

ABSTRACT

A communication system includes a network switch coupled through a telephone line uniquely associated with each customer for budgeted telephone calling time and amount, either pre-paid or post-paid, the budgeted amount being recorded in the system for calling purposes. A server is coupled to the switch for automated control of the budgeted telephone calls and costs. The server includes a control processor having access to databases for recorded budgeted amounts and call routing. A voice response unit is coupled to the processor and sends messages to the calling customer at the beginning of each budget telephone call indicating remaining budgeted telephone calling time and amount available to the calling purposes. The processor debits the customer account by an amount reflecting the call costs as the call proceeds. A voice message advises the calling customer when the available time and costs for the budgeted telephone call will terminate. Depending upon customer preference, the call may (i) terminate when the budget amount is exceeded or (ii) continue subject to a warning that the call budget has been exceeded with a prompt to obtain additional prepaid budgeted calling time and cost or (iii) continue the call and subsequent calls subject to later payment by the calling customer. Calls are placed directly to the calling party without accessing a special toll number or providing a credit card number.

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